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# Oddly, Israelis Misunderstand Us

By Suzanne Garment

**T**he prospect of hanging, they say, concentrates the mind. Let us hope that the life sentence given to Jonathan Jay Pollard will serve the same purpose. We need less moralizing about the Israeli-American mess and more inquiry into what went wrong.

It has been almost a year since the former naval intelligence analyst and his wife were arrested on charges of spying for Israel. Most people keeping track of the story assumed that the United States and Israel would work out a deal to limit the damage to both sides. But they were wrong. Mr. Pollard's sentence came as a grim shock.

What happened? Things got off to a reasonable start. When the case broke, Shimon Peres, then Israel's Prime Minister, promised full cooperation with the American investigators. The Israelis made officials available in Israel to give testimony to visiting American law-enforcement authorities. But the Israelis could not believe they would be expected to go further in disclosing all the facts of the case.

The Israelis were worried about their national security, of course. Just as important, they did not and would not view the Pollard matter as a conventional criminal case: It was a political affair needing a political solution. Surely, in the course of time, they felt, the American criminal investigation would be superseded by high-level state-to-state understandings.

Knowledgeable Americans told the Israelis that our criminal justice system does not work that way. Prosecutors cannot be turned off like faucets; it is dangerous for an official to try. The Israelis were also told that if prosecutors think they are being misled, or if crucial information is being withheld, they become peeved and may pursue their quarry with special enthusiasm.

The Israelis refused to act as if these propositions were true. Think of it: For almost 40 years, since America recognized Israel, citizens of each country have had unparalleled inside views of the political processes of the other. Yet the Pollard case showed that the Israelis simply did not understand how our system operates.

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Here is one lesson to be drawn from this confusion: The Israelis need more humility about the extent to which they really understand the United States. Such humility might be useful in all sorts of areas. For instance, the sentencing of Mr. Pollard, an American Jew, has upset American Jewish leaders. (His wife, Anne Henderson Pollard, received five years in prison.) They have criticized Israeli intransigence in the affair.

An anti-American backlash has developed among some Israelis. In The Jerusalem Post, the political theorist Shlomo Avineri has just written a "Letter to an American Friend" that derides the American Jews' consternation. The problem, he says, is that they are still afraid of being thought un-American: "You still feel now as vulnerable as Soviet or Iranian Jews." He elaborates: "You are afraid that Jews will not be able to get responsible positions in your bureaucracy ... that Jews will be denied access to sensitive positions." "America," he mocks, "may not be your Promised Land."

For all the years of Israel's existence, Mr. Avineri has had the opportunity to watch American Jews and the politics of which they are a part. This has not been such a bad 40 years. While American Jews have had their share of fools, they have managed to do a bit more in politics than keep themselves from getting shot, jailed or otherwise oppressed. They have managed to help build a stable, supportive relationship between America and Israel that could not have been imagined in 1948.

By any reasonable measure, this has been an unusual achievement. When American Jews condemn the Pollard affair so loudly, it is this accomplishment that they see threatened. They are not cowering over threats to their lives or livelihoods, the way Soviet Jews do.

Mr. Avineri somehow missed this basic reality of American Jewish life. Here we have another sort of ignorance that should make Israelis more diffident than they have been about their ability to understand America and American Jews.

The United States and Israel have grown very close in recent years. The Pollard case warns that the closeness is beginning to produce an ignorant confidence and a contempt born of spurious familiarity. A single sensational lesson like the Pollard case should be enough to shake both these attitudes. □